The Esthetic Cut-Throat.

By J. A. TIFFANY.

As the train approached Utica, the benevolent old gentleman in the seat in front of mine leaned forward, to get a better view from the window, and, smiling at his companion, said:

"There's the bridge from which, fifty years ago, sliding down a rope fastened to the balustrade, I dropped on to the deck of a passing canal boat, slew the bargee and his wife, took what money they had—a paltry eighteen dollars—then steered to the towpath, jumped ashore, and got away before the man driving the horses knew anything was wrong. Ah! ah!" and he chuckled and rubbed his hands as if the recollection of his horrible crime afforded him much satisfaction.

All the way from Syracuse, when they boarded the train, I had sat watching the old lady and gentleman, with an interest and admiration that received a rude shock from this extraordinary speech of his.

He was a picturesque old fellow, with his pointed beard, long, wavy white hair and light blue eyes, in which I caught a merry twinkle whenever he happened to turn his head. His skin had the rose-pink of a healthy baby and his voice, low and musical, had a sympathetic vibrant resonance, that was pleasing to the ear. The old lady was well-preserved as her companion—a stately dame, with dignified mein, yet a kind, motherly expression about the mouth and eyes.

The man's bearing toward her savored of the old-fashioned courtesy of a more respectful age than ours; and, though they were evidently man and wife, who had spent probably half a century in each other's society, the lady manifested her exquisite breeding in a hundred charming ways as she discoursed in low tones with the man at her side, treating with the graciousness due to an honored friend rather than assuming privileges of familiarity or proprietorship.

Lolling back in my seat, I had sketched a fanciful picture of their career—a life in which a modest independence had enabled both of them to develop all that was best in their character in ministering, in a quiet and unostentatious way to the needs of less fortunate fellow-creatures.

I had conjured up their home life, with numerous children and grandchildren, with kindly neighbors and refined, congenial friends; and I saw these two, each Sunday, going arm in arm to church, or sauntering leisurely down some shady lane that courtship days had rendered sacred in their age. It was at this stage of my reverie that I had been startled by the old gentleman's calm, dispassionate declaration of the brutal murder that he had committed half-a-century ago.

"Don't—don't talk so loud, Stephen," his wife admonished him, shaking her head and frowning slightly. "You don't know who might hear you."

"Oh, well; it doesn't matter, Carrie," he answered. "That was a long time ago; and I've reformed."

Reformed! Was there ever, I wondered, such a cynical, complaisant old cut-throat as this? In one sentence he told of killing a man and woman, for the sake of a few dollars, and in the next declared that he had "reformed"—much in the tone of a college boy who informs his friends that he has quit smoking cigarettes.

"Besides, he continued, with a smile, "you know that was one of my chief reasons for coming East was to re-visit the scenes of my early days, and point out to you the different spots where I committed arson and robbery and murder."

"Yes, yes, I know Stephen," the old lady answered, with an indulgent smile. "To see you now one would never believe what a terrible character you were, as a young man."

"No," he said. "I have to thank you, Carrie, for showing me a better, easier way of making a living. I should never have got rich in that business; but there was a certain fascination to it. For seven years I reveled in crime—just wallowed in gore—and sometimes I look back with wistful regret to the old days. How I used to enjoy looting a bank, firing a factory, shooting a policeman, scuttling a ship or wrecking a train."

"I should have thought, Stephen," the old lady replied, with a shake of the head, "that it would have been dreadfully nervous business. I wonder you could sleep at night."

"Never stayed awake a minute," the old man answered promptly. "I remember perfectly well the night that I found the weak spot in the Otis dam and flooded the village of Ashwell, drowning six hundred men, women and children. I took a short walk after my work was done, then went to bed and slept for eight hours without dreaming."

"What a bloodthirsty man you must have been, Stephen," the old lady remarked, in a tone of mild reproof. "I don't think it was nice to kill off the poor women and children like that."

"Well, you see, Dodson was sore about not getting the contract for the dam; he claimed the construction was faulty; and when, after two years, nothing happened, he just had to have the dam break. I made quite an artistic job of it, too. But here we're coming to Herkimer. It was at this point, Carrie, that I held up the Buffalo express and looted the express-car while the train-crew was busy attending to the injured. It was quite a miracle that so few were killed that night—only three or four, I think, and all of them old people, who couldn't have lived many years anyway."

"No one would think, marking the levity with which you speak of these horrible crimes, that you had as tender a haert as ever beat."

"Oh, one can get used to anything—anything but the gallows, as my father used to say. A man must live, you know."

"There is an old saying that one should 'live and let live,'" the old lady answered, shaking her forefinger reprovingly.

"That's true," the old gentleman replied, "and as a matter of fact, I soon got tired of wholesale butchery. Of course, as a pirate, it was often necessary for my own safety to make a ship's crew walk the plank; but, after I gave up the sea, I began to turn my attention to high-art crime.

"I found forgery more to my taste than highway robbery; and, when I had to kill a man, I always tried to do it by some novel and ingenious method that would sharpen the wits of the detectives working on the case. Of course, when a burglar is cornered, he shoots, and shoots to kill; but I always tried to improve upon my methods of murder—to get away from the old, vulgar methods of the bludgeon, the knife and the gun."

"I don't think anyone ever devised more ingenious methods of taking life than you did, Stephen," the old lady remarked, approvingly.

"No. Now there was that fellow, Holloway. I put him to sleep in a room, the inside blinds of which I had securely fastened from the outside, so that he couldn't get at the window, to open it or break a pane of glass, in case he felt difficulty in breathing. I had the door fitted around with air-tight strips,so that the only places where air could get into the room were the key-hole and the transom.

"When he had fallen asleep, with the aid of a hook on the end of a stick I lowered the transom, fastened it securely; then, inserting a pump into the keyhole, I exhausted the air in the room—drew it out of Holloway's lungs, too.

"The doctors said he died of suffocation; but how he came to suffocate was a mystery. They found the transom and the window open; and the cause of Holloway's death was never discovered."

"When we get to New York, you must show me the house where that happened," the old lady answered, beaming upon her companion.

"Sure I will," the husband replied; "and the place in the park, where I buried the policeman, who was going to arrest me as a suspicious character. New York has changed, I suppose, in the last forty or fifty years; but it would be difficult for them to transform a street so that I couldn't go into it today and say:

"'There's the site of the old Jug-and-Bottle inn, where I shot the English dude, who tried to cheat at cards;' or 'Here stood the house of Jonathan Todd, the miser, who died from an overdose of chloroform that I administered preliminary to searching his premises;' or 'On this lot stood an old stone mansion, where, forty-five years ago, I killed three brothers, who came upon me stealthily, while I was collecting the silver in the dining-room.'"

In this strain the old gentleman talked from the time we left Utica until the train drew into the Grand Central station at New York.

There were moments when the recital of his atrocious crimes made me feel sick and faint. Occasionally, I pinched my self to make sure that I was awake and not the victim of some diabolical nightmare.

Again, I wondered if the old man was insane, and the lady was simply humoring his whim by pretending to believe all the fantasies that crowded his diseased imagination, presenting themselves as reminiscences of his youthful days.

But, whenever I caught a glance of the old man's eye, I saw no suspicion of mania. It was a clear, steady eye; whose mild, benignant expression, doubtless, had been one of its owner's best assests in enabling him to pose before the world as a model citizen, while with consummate cunning he had succeeded in effacing all traces of his connection with some of the most dastardly crimes of a past generation.

But, I reflected, what a life this woman's must have been. She must have met and married him without knowing anything of his criminal career. She had been won, doubtless, by his refined, handsome face, his thrilling voice and courtly manners. She had looked up to him as her beau ideal of a man. Perhaps, for months or years he had allowed her to cherish her illusion; and then, his egregrious vanity his callous indifference to every law human and divine, had prompted him, little by little, to reveal incidents in the dark past.

At first the woman had shrunk from from him in horror. Perhaps, she had left his house and gone to her own people, carrying the dark secret locked in her own bosom.

Then, as he had sought her out and pleaded with her, pointed to his irreproachable habits since his marriage threatened to return to his lawless ways unless she should come back to him; and she had yielded to his prayers; she had remembered her marriage vows, and decided to live up to them—to love and cherish him in sickness and in health, to cling to him, for better or for worse.

And from that reconciliation had dated the tragedy of this woman's moral deterioration; the gradual decay of all her finer sensibilities. The old habit of hero-worship had returned, and from condemning his crimes she had come to find a certain fearful pride in them. While she would chide him for his graceless gloating over robbery and murder, secretly she had admired the nerve and courage which had enabled him to carry out his plots and schemes, she applauded the aplomb with which for forty years or more he had held his head erect and looked every man squarely in the face, mutely defying the world to find in him the solution of the ghastly mysteries that had baffled two generations of criminal investigators.

With thoughts like these passing through my mind, I found myself in New York; and, as the old lady and gentleman stood up to leave the train, I followed close behind them, determined to learn their names and their destination.

As they stepped on to the platform, I caught sight of my friend Tom Whitely; but before I could speak to him he had rushed up to the old people, given them each a hand and kissed the old lady on the forehead.

He drew them aside, out of the way of the crowd, and giving their checks to an expressman led the way out of the station to a taxicab that he had in waiting.

As they reached the cab, I touched his elbow, intending to ask him about the old people. Turning around, Tom grabbed my hand, and said:

"Hello Dick—back from Chicago? You must have come in by the same train as my father and mother. I want to introduce you."

He did so; and both Mr. and Mrs. Whitely smiled and shook my hand, saying that they were sorry they had not known on the train that I was a friend of Tom's

"Come up to the house to dinner tomorrow night, if you have no other engagement," said Whitely, as his father and mother took their seats in the taxicab.

"Thanks, I can't promise now," I said. "But I'll telephone you in the morning. I think you told me once that your father was a retired publisher?"

"Yes; he had a printing and publishing business in San Francisco. Sold out ten years ago, and retired."

"What was his business as a young man, when he lived in New York?"

"He started out as a reporter, but he soon quit and took to writing dime novels. They were hot stuff. You wouldn't think it to look at the old gentleman; but he wrote some of the most bloodthirsty tales that ever were printed. They were all written in the first person. He always lived his stories; and it's amusing to hear him talk about all the murders and robberies that he committed."

"Yes," I said, "it is—when you understand. On the train I heard him own up to enough crimes to send him to the electric chair once a week for the next ten years."

"AN ABORTIVE HERO."

"I reached Harper's Ferry about noon on Wednesday, the 18th of October, 1859, following the descent of the preceding Sunday night and Monday morning. I found there a good deal of suppressed feeling; not any tumult, or noise, or confusion. There had assembled quite a little army of us, newspaper reporters from the adjacent cities, but chiefly from Washington, whence the regular correspondents of the leading newspapers proceeded to the scene of what seemed a catastrophe, news of which fell upon the capital and the country like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky. I saw and talked with John Brown. I was as much opposed to human slavery, as earnest a devotee of human freedom, as he was, and therefore, I had no personal aversion to overcome. The horror I might have felt was deadened by the dramatic intensity of the moment. Colonel Lee was still there. Lieutenant Stuart, afterward the famous Confederate general, was my near friend, and from his lips I learned all the details of what had happened. He uttered not a word of bitterness or reproach. "The old man is crazy," said he. Recurring to the century which Dr. Rhodes gives the world for reaching a just conclusion as to John Brown, I take leave to believe his place in history will be fixed long before its expiration as that of a brutal fanatic, possessed by the homicidal mania; nor that historians will further concern themselves about his follies and crimes. There was nothing about him to stir the affection of those who knew him, or to invest his memory with popular interest.—Henry Watterson, in the January number of The North American Review.

THEN THEY TALKED IN ENGLISH.

A couple of Cleveland business men visited Mexico. In Mexico City their train was switched from one station to another. One of the Clevelanders went to the first station to make inquiries. Approaching a pair of dark visaged employees, he cudgeled his memory for the proper words from the phrase book.

"Donde esta?" he hesitatingly asked and paused.

The two dark visaged persons listened attentively.

"Gracias," stammered the Cleveland man. "Donde estan?"

Then one of the men looked at the other.

"Say, Bill," he growled, "what in merry blue blazes is this fellow talkin' about?"

And after that it was easy.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

It is easier to enrich ourselves with a thousand virtues than to correct ourselves of a single fault.—Bruyere.